



April 1st, 2020

Dear patients and families who attend the BCCH Asthma and Severe Asthma Clinics,

We have received a lot of questions about the coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak and how to best protect children from serious illness. At this time, recommendations for screening and self-isolating are the same for children with asthma as for the general public:

- Mild breathing symptoms do not need testing. Only patients who are being hospitalized or likely to be hospitalized need testing.
- If your child has a fever and new respiratory symptoms, please contact your primary care provider. Advice will be given as to whether your child needs to be seen.
- If your child requires additional medical treatment, it will be prescribed by your primary care provider.

Please note: recommendations are always changing and this document is up-to-date as of April 1, 2020.

Most reported cases of COVID-19 in children are mild and the symptoms are similar to a regular cold or flu. In general, there isn't evidence showing children with asthma are more impacted by this virus. The same precautions as for any other seasonal virus are to be practiced.

Your decision to seek medical care should be guided by your child's symptoms. Public Health officials continue to collect data and provide guidance on a regular basis as this situation evolves. To minimize the chance of infection, please follow the advice of Public Health Officials:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Using soap and water is the single most effective way of reducing the spread of infection.

- If a sink is not available, alcohol based hand rubs can be used to clean your hands as long as they are not visibly soiled. If they are visibly soiled, use a wipe and then use alcohol based hand rubs to effectively clean them.
- Do not touch your face, eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue or the crease of your elbow when you sneeze or cough.
- Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- Do not share food, drinks, utensils, etc.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- If you are sick, wearing a mask may help prevent you from passing on illnesses to other people.
- If you are not sick, it may be less effective to wear a mask in the community.

Clinic visits:

In keeping with the Provincial Health Officer's advice to encourage social distancing, we are rescheduling all non-urgent appointments.

- 1) If your child had an appointment scheduled, you will be contacted by the clinic clerk to reschedule your appointment or convert it to a telephone or virtual health visit. Your physician/nurse practitioner has assessed whether it would be appropriate to conduct your child's clinic visit by telephone or virtual health. In some cases, where tests are needed to make care decisions, these appointments will be rescheduled.
- 2) The Asthma nurses continue to be available **(M-F 8:00-4:00) at 604-875-2345 ext 7461** for patients followed in the clinic. Please allow 24-72 hours for calls to be returned.

Asthma and COVID:

- 1) Viruses are a common trigger for asthma attacks and there is currently no evidence that COVID causes more frequent or severe attacks in comparison to other viruses.

- 2) If your child uses inhaled steroid medicine for their asthma, it is important to continue using it. This medicine should be used everyday even when there are no symptoms to prevent asthma attacks. You may have heard reports that anti-inflammatory medication may cause more severe lung disease in patients with COVID. These reports are not proven and are not referring to inhaled steroids. You should continue to follow your asthma action plan.
- 3) Steroids taken orally as a liquid or pill (eg. Prednisolone, prednisone, dexamethasone) are still important and safe to treat serious asthma attacks even if your child has COVID. You may have heard reports that oral steroids are not useful for lung disease caused by COVID. These reports are not talking about asthma. It is important, that if someone prescribes oral steroids to treat your child's asthma attack, that they take this medication.

Pharmacies are able to provide an emergency supply of medication without a prescription. If you need refills, please contact your pharmacy. **They will fax the clinic: 604-875-3653.** Stockpiling routine medications is not recommended. You may only be given a one month prescription at the pharmacy even if your prescription allows you to fill 3 months, as pharmacies want to ensure they have enough medication for everyone. For reliever medications, we suggest tracking the number of doses left in your inhalers as you may not be able to get more refills (<http://www.bcchildrens.ca/health-info/coping-support/asthma>). It is important to have at least a two-week supply of routine medications, in case self-isolation is necessary.

We understand this is an anxious time for our families. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we navigate this changing situation.

If you have more questions, please don't hesitate to contact the clinic.

Sincerely,

BC Children's Hospital Asthma Program
604-875-3042

Here are some links to more information:

Financial Support for families affected by COVID



https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-finance/economic-response-plan/covid19-individuals.html#new_canada_emergency_response_benefit

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/covid-19-provincial-support>

Asthma information

<http://www.bcchildrens.ca/health-info/coping-support/asthma>

BC Children's COVID-19 webpage:

<http://www.bcchildrens.ca/health-info/covid-19-and-children-information-for-patients>

BCCDC main COVID-19 website:

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19>

BC COVID-19 Symptom Self-Assessment Tool website:

<https://covid19.thrive.health>

HealthLinkBC Coronavirus (COVID-19) website:

https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/hlbc/files/documents/healthfeature/hf_040_coronavirus_covid-19.pdf